

Augustus maintain his position history essay



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In order to construct and sustain his position of authority, Augustus employed the use of both 'soft power' and 'hard power' throughout his regime. Aside from the military dominance of the so-called 'hard power', Augustus' manipulation of cultural activity strengthened his authority, grounding his rule through the premise of social reformation, conscripting both moral and cultural influences at the forefront.

Augustus' rise to power contrasted against that of Julius Caesar: Augustus adapted a slower, subtler method in order to attain command, careful not to imply any intentions of adopting a Caesarian monarchical dominance over the people, thus demonstrating his support of the Republic and the traditions of the Roman people. The shift from an oligarchic to an autocratic regime seemed "almost seamless to his contemporaries"[1] as a result of Augustus' tactful undermining of the Republican system.

Augustus' rise to power demonstrates a major transformation of the Roman political system, which survived in some places up until the 15th century; in order to have achieved this, Augustus had to employ manipulative tactics to alter the dynamics of Rome in order to maintain his power.

Monument buildings were one of Augustus' main preoccupations - memorialising himself to the Roman future, and as Suetonius stated, preparing Rome and securing it against any disasters, "as far as could be effected by human foresight"[2]. Following the civil wars, Augustus employed social reform as a means to transform Rome to a place of prestige and honour. Part of this social reform was to rejuvenate religion. Religious piety was seen as key to Roman success, and new order needed a pure

Roman religion. With cults and deities of the East encroaching on Roman religion, Augustus had encouraged a return to the religious devotion of the early republic, and he marked this return in 17BC with the Secular Games. These games were initially founded in the Early Republic and so Augustus' celebration of these 'ludi saeculares' was significant in its reference to the Republic, once again demonstrating his commitment to the traditions of the Roman people.

It is likely that Augustus recognised the power of religion as a smokescreen to disguise his changes to politics; this power founded in the genuine importance of religion to the Roman people. He restored buildings destroyed by conflict and, as stated in his *Res Gestae*, renovated 82 temples to their former glory. His particular focus on restoring religion, as Pontifex Maximus, head of state religion, also showed his intention to improve the moral condition of the people. In this way, Augustus could present himself as the reviver of Roman religion, priesthood and the object of many prayers said in Rome; further securing his position of authority through the power of religion.

The *Res Gestae* itself was erected long before Augustus' death and this suggests that he believed that he would reign continuously. As a public text, inscribed on pillars in Rome, Augustus demonstrated the intention of the text to be read in a public context, by passers by; inscribed not merely for a contemporary audience, but also for posterity. The content of the *Res Gestae*, acted as a kind of self composed eulogy, commemorating all of his successes; a piece of propaganda which recorded and promoted his position of authority.

In 28BC Augustus dedicated the temple of Apollo Palatinus next to his house and attached to this a library consisting of two sections, one for Greek literature, the other for Latin. This focus upon the creation and accessibility of texts identifies Augustus encouragement of literature. Literature, like monumental buildings, served an exemplary purpose, setting examples to the Roman people through cultural demonstration. Not only did the temple, and the adjoining library suggest that Rome was to become the centre of the arts and knowledge, but referred back to the Alexandrian library, notable as a cultural epicentre. To attain such renown would increase Augustus' popularity and further his success as the ruler of Rome.

Augustus manipulated the arts, the “ power of visual images”[3]and the varied and skilled literary forms of the time in order to create the myth of a “ god-like ruler in a new Rome”. These works were more enduring than the temples erected, and spoke more of a public opinion of Augustus. Imperial portraiture glorified Augustus to the people, and through exploration of the neo-Classical style, it represented Augustus as a heroic leader to Rome.

Many Augustan poets spoke of their poetry in terms of constructing a monument that will outlive them, “...more durable than bronze...”[4], enabling an element of the individuality of the creator and their subject to survive. In just this way the ancient poet, Virgil's epic poem, the ' Aeneid', as some critics have considered, represents Augustus as a divine part of Roman history, and a monument to his legacy.

Throughout Augustus' reign, Rome entered a golden age in which the arts, particularly literature, architecture and art prospered. The introduction of

state patronage further encouraged the creation of great works. Under Augustus' authority, some of the most revolutionising and historically defining pieces were produced. Through this process of patronage, poets and artists were dealt with through Augustus himself, however, in light of this, Augustus appointed a cultural advisor, Maecenas to help him in this process. Within this ' Age of Augustus' some of Rome's most prominent poets and historians such as Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Livy produced and published their greatest works. Through patronage, poets and writers acted as a mouthpiece for Augustus' regime, a vehicle for conveying his beliefs and often, particularly in the cases of Suetonius and Horace, portraying him in a positive light to the Roman people.

As I have previously mentioned, Virgil's ' Aeneid' is an epic poem, which has been closely associated with Augustus. Aeneas, the main protagonist and ' founder of Rome' represents the Stoic values of suffering for a good cause, making sacrifices for the benefit of the future of Rome. His links with the values of piety, bravery and duty all reflect upon qualities supposedly attributed to Augustus and although there is great contestation as to whether the Aeneid was intended as an appraisal or a criticism of Augustus, what is clear is that Virgil presents an undeniable glorification of Rome.

As part of Augustus' regeneration of Rome following the conflict of the civil wars, vast amounts of public sculpture and portraiture were produced, not only to promote Augustus' authority but also to remind people that they were part of the Roman state. Art and sculpture depicted Augustus and his wife, Livia in the same styles, poses and positions, creating recognisable images, which could be spread around the empire to propagate his

importance and stature. Often, as in the Augustan statue from Prima Porta, with its “heroic pose and ideal proportions of Polycleitus’ Doryphorus the artist”[5], Augustus referenced political messages through valiant stances and military motifs. To a largely illiterate public, and within an empire spanning across both the East and West with various languages, Augustus used the medium of art to translate both his power and his intentions for the empire. In a similar way, Augustus as Pontifex Maximus was depicted in a more sober and pious manner, with his head veiled for sacrifice, stern brow and far-sighted gaze. This alternate presentation of Augustus is important in understanding the image he projected to the people; Augustus extends beyond a political authority to a religious elder and the combination of the two makes him exemplary.

Augustus used social and moral reform to create a stable environment in which he could ascertain his power and set about this by passing laws, which would regulate marriages, family life and moral conduct. These reforms occurred in 18BC and are known as Lex Julia. The central concerns of Roman people were to achieve a stable and ordered society, abolishment of civil war and a concern in maintaining traditions. Through moral reformation, Augustus tried to identify what it was that produced a stable society and what caused anarchy.

In order to encourage moral reformation, Augustus presented himself as a moral example to everyone. He expected people to put their piety above their personal interests; in order to promote this, Augustus followed the same moral code, putting the state before his personal pleasure. It was as a result of this attitude to morality that Augustus recognised that he had to act

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upon the immoral behaviour of his daughter, Julia who had been involved in several adulterous affairs. The laws he had put into place punished adultery with banishment, and so in light of this Augustus felt obliged to banish his own daughter. Some people, most notably the historian Tacitus considered Augustus to have been far stricter with these laws for his own relatives than was altogether necessary[6], however this action demonstrated his dedication to the laws in place, and to the Roman Empire. Although the laws put in place by Augustus represented an element of political office, his adherence to these laws demonstrated that he did not abuse his power, and presented himself as a fair ruler.

Augustus also acted as a role model in so far as art and sculpture of the time used the same styles and poses that had been seen in Augustan portraiture, while the dress of the women in Augustus' family is seen replicated in sculptures of Goddesses throughout Rome. Augustus and Livia formed a role model for Roman families; despite their wealth, they lived modestly and Livia remained faithful and loyal to Augustus throughout their marriage.

As a result of the civil unrest of the Republic, Augustus was faced with poverty and violence within the city. Besides cultural improvements, he introduced a " more regular supply of subsidized grain for the poor"[7]and watchmen in the city to maintain peace. Periodic distributions and donations to the poor coincided with commemorative days or days of political importance, thus increasing his popularity amongst the lower classes.

By encouraging Roman culture to flourish and creativity to spread, Augustus could ensure that his ' age' would stand out as a prominent time of cultural

activity in Rome's history and would reflect upon Augustus' reign in a very positive manner. Through use of art, literature, architecture and propaganda, Augustus managed to establish his image as 'princeps' and maintained it to the point by which at his death, he was deified. Whereas his military and political successes were important in imperial expansion, the 'soft power' he employed created a more secure Rome and increased his popularity.

Within the 'Pax Romana', or the 'Roman Peace', a period of political and social stability, economic prosperity and cultural excellence, Augustus wanted to ensure that the empire was a far safer place in which to live and to make it more efficient as well. With greater efficiency, and more cooperation from the people, Augustus could project his intention for the empire onto the people without vast objection and without needing to employ the tactics of 'hard power'. Through use of 'soft power', Augustus could maintain the security of peace within Rome without civil wars while manipulating the social and cultural infrastructure to accommodate and fully accept his leadership.